

Business Alert

Federal Trade Commission ■ Bureau of Consumer Protection ■ Office of Consumer and Business Education

When Yellow Pages Invoices Are Bogus

Washington, D.C. - That mail invoice bearing the familiar “walking fingers” logo and the name “Yellow Pages” could be a camouflaged invitation to lose money.

The Federal Trade Commission (FTC) and the Yellow Pages Publishers Association (YPPA) caution businesses that unscrupulous promoters are soliciting advertising for online, alternative or nonexistent business directories. Although these directories appear to be legitimate Yellow Pages publications, they are not distributed to the public, posted on the web, or promoted as promised. As a result, the directories — if they exist at all — offer no benefits to businesses that pay to advertise in them.

The solicitation to buy ad space may look like an invoice and bear the “walking fingers” logo and the Yellow Pages name. Neither the name nor the logo is protected by federal copyright or trademark registration. That’s how fraudulent promoters are able to lead businesses to believe they are affiliated with local telephone directories distributed in a particular area.

The U.S. Postal Service requires solicitations that look like invoices, bills or account statements to carry the following notice: **THIS IS NOT A BILL. THIS IS A SOLICITATION. YOU ARE UNDER NO OBLIGATION TO PAY THE AMOUNT STATED ABOVE UNLESS YOU ACCEPT THIS OFFER.**

Of course, not all solicitations you receive in the mail look like bills, invoices or account statements. Be skeptical anyway. Some solicitations could violate the law if they misrepresent information.

Before you buy advertising space through a mail solicitation or pay an “invoice,” take the following steps:

- Check out the company and its publication. Call your local Yellow Pages publisher to see if it is affiliated with the soliciting company.
- Ask for a copy of a previous directory edition.
- Ask for the online directory’s web address and call advertisers in the directory to ask if their listing has been a good buy. If your business is listed in the Yellow Pages of a legitimate publisher, you likely will be listed in their online directory at no charge.
- Ask the publisher for written information about where the directory is distributed, how it is distributed (does every local telephone customer receive it?), how often it is published, and distribution or circulation figures.
- Check with your local and state consumer protection agencies to determine if any complaints have been filed about the publisher. This isn’t a guarantee, but it is a prudent step.

If you think you’ve been scammed by a promoter pitching bogus Yellow Pages or business directories, contact your local Postmaster or Postal Inspector. Their numbers are available in the blue pages of your telephone directory. Or, write: Chief Postal Inspector, United States Postal Service, Washington, D.C. 20260-2100. You also can call the Mail Fraud Complaint Center at 1-800-372-8347. You can reach them online at www.usps.gov/feedback.

You also may contact the Consumer Response Center at the Federal Trade Commission, Washington, D.C. 20580; toll free, at 1-877-FTC-HELP (382-4357); TDD: 202-326-2502. To file a complaint with the FTC, use the online complaint form at www.ftc.gov.

In addition, you may direct questions about Yellow Pages publishers to: Yellow Pages Publishers Association, 3773 Cherry Creek North Drive, Suite 920, Denver, Colorado 80209; 303-333-9772.

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